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ABSTRACT

The authors of this paper believe that oral art shapes the whole life of people and the whole life of people shapes their oral art. They believe that oral art reflects the moral codes, ethical principles, spiritual striving and varying needs of people while providing insights that enhance self-worth. The authors propose that these reflections are consonant with the concerns of education and guidance and that black oral art, used effectively for educational guidance purposes, can have a positive impact on the development of black youth. To that end, the authors present three group techniques that make use of black oral art: fostering self-esteem and achievement motivation, promoting educational excellence and school retention, and developing determination and persistence in worthy endeavors. The authors describe each technique through a statement of general purpose or rationale, a presentation of methods of facilitation, and lists of intended learning experiences. (Author/HK)

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BLACK ORAL ART FORMS: EDUCATIONAL GROUP GUIDANCE TECHNIQUES

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Introduction

For their optimal adjustment and development, human beings require some system of beliefs and values to which to commit themselves (Cantril, 1967). They also desire cultural maintenance and wish to project their cultural specificity onto the whole of the universe (Gerald, 1972). The artistic legitimacy of certain cultural oral expressions has been well validated (Calame-Griaule, 1968) and they serve, as do other art forms, to effect beliefs and values which are pertinent to a culture's maintenance and higher development. Oral art (stories, tales, myths, legends, biographics, liturgies, initation rituals, lyrical songs, riddles, and proverbs) like other art forms is a mirror of life. As John Mibiti (1968) notes, "It reflects what people do, what they think, how they live, what values they hold, what joys and what sorrows they experience." It is a full picture of every aspect of a people's existence. From the Creator who sustain life, to lifeless objects, everything is captured in the rhythm of existence. The life of man is mirrored in oral art, covering his nature (moods, attitudes, beliefs, values, hopes and aspirations or the sum total of his personality) and as such offers a rich glimpse at a human experience lending to a fuller understanding of humankind and provides possibilities for their maximal development. Hence, oral art forms have serious developmental implications which will be explored here.

Fonda (1968) has commented on the historical legacy of oral art and its function in regulating human behavior. Homer's Illiad and Odyssey belong to oral art. Fonda contends that, "Jewish students of Eastern Europe used often to learn by heart long passages of the Bible and of the Talmud." He further states, "the composition and the oral transmission of the Messiah and the Gemara are well known . . ., the Finnish epic the Kalevada, was composed and recited for centuries in Scandinavia;" and the case of Indian oratory is even more striking. This historical capsulation suggests that oral art is anthropocentric and works toward actualizing mankind as Fouda ably points out, "according to the landmarks and the beacons fixed by the sovereign ancestors." The gestation of oral art occurs within a cultural context. The major cultural groups of the world have developed characteristic modes for exercising their intellectual and affective expressions that are clearly recognizable and clearly different from one another. The educational and guidance implications of oral art are represented in all the cultural groups though the principal concern in this writing is with Black or African oral expressive forms. The all encompassing function of oratory among traditional African people and their descendants is well-known. The rich folklore of Americans of African descent is testimonial to the continuation and aesthetic preference for this tradition. Counselors and teachers have a rich cultural resource from which to draw so as to effect positive outcomes in their work with Black children.

The Cultural Dimension of Black Oral Art

Toldson and Pasteur (1976) have discussed the use of Black art forms in guidance tasks. The artistic sensibilities or creative thrusts of

people of African extraction, particularly those of indigenous roots, have been addressed psychologically and educationally under the subject of the "Black Aesthetic," by these authors. The black aesthetic is characterized thusly:

> "Inherent in the black aesthetic is a constant urge flow into/with, unite - it in the human soul attempting to wed with the cosmos. The black aesthetic, then, is an energy source propelling a humanistic value orientation, which grows out of a reverence for nature/God/the universe, and is observed in human behavior expressed creatively and artistically and steeped in affect."

Oratory is a medium through which the black aesthetic is expressed and is highly valued among people of the African family. Vocal manifestations play a large role and appear on very different levels in social life. Ceremonious occasions make immense use of oral art. Outside of these occasions, everyday life makes constant calls upon oral art. Diverse labor is accompanied by songs, often peculiar to each trade. Included in the category of ceremonial or ritual value are nationalistic songs, religious poetry, mythic recitals, devices, genealogic recitations, eulogies, and historical legendary traditions. The everyday or practical category embraces work songs, blues, spiritual-gospel, ritual insults, fables, tales, riddles, proverbial speech, counting games, catch words, etc. and has as its aim education, catharsis and amusement. The oral art of Black society becomes strengthened into a social memory, because it is the memory of a people. Transmitted by the social memory, it becomes linked with group continuity. It must reaffirm itself continually, in order to keep alive, in action within and by the living beings who hold it graven on their various memories. Thus of necessity Black oral art is a social art that tells Blacks of their heritage and destiny; it sings of the struggle of life, and of the struggle for liberty; it sings, too, of victory.

The word is the constituent element of oral art and of human reality. Man classifies his joys and woes by words and in the same way he proclaims his hopes and his fears. Man becomes conscious of his human adventures and by the word expresses that often militant and turbulent experience. Thus by the word, the evocation and exclamation thereof is synthesized into oral art and constitutes a true exorcism of the black experience.

The Educational and Guidance Implications of Black Oral Art

The practice of educational guidance draws heavily from the behavioral and social sciences, and significantly from the biological and physical sciences. But as Glanz (1974) notes in his discussion of guidance and the humanities:

> "The humanities, and only the humanities, can help guidance to value life and its practice. Psychology helps guidance to the realization that values are learned, but learned values must be assessed against the yardstick of man's own understanding of himself and his world. Man cannot give meaning or purpose to his life without understanding the aesthetic as well as the practical nature of human behavior.
>
> The humanities can direct the choices of values and the solving of problems that create man's freedom and responsibility. The quality, purpose, and meaning of life are revealed as these privileges are exercised (p. 106)."

It is within this humanistic framework that educational guidance can make use of oral art and positively impact the development of black youth. The need for culturally oriented education and guidance procedures to impact the life circumstances of black youth is dramatically apparent; the blighted educational data on Black children's development attest to this need. In that the function of oral art within the culture of Black people (in a non-formalized way) provides education and guidance, ethnically authentic educational procedures can be readily created from this rich resource. Consider some of the non-formalized ways in which oral art provides education and guidance in communities of African heritage.

Oral art forms have inherent moral and ethical values to be learned. These relate to relationships between parent and children, fairness in the treatment of other people, respect for responsibe authority, respect for knowledge and understanding, and other moral codes. Oral art plays a role in helping the young understand social structures, their evolution and control. Beyond the social ethics, oral art serves to provide a deeper knowledge of ones culture and gives one a sense of historical continuity and sameness, which are important concepts in the development of one's identity (Erickson, 1968), and the maintenance of high levels of self esteem. This particularly true of historical - legendary oratory. Eastman (1972) in her analysis of Black proverbial speech shows how proverbs exhort persons to think before acting, as in "Haste has no blessing." Proverbs demonstrate empathy. They tend to crystallize the experience of people and as such have high facilitative possibilities. Oral art form have psychological functions as well. In its amusing and serious aspects, oral art provokes the catharsis of tension and conflict through laughter, as well as facilitating conflict resolution through its reflective, contemplative features. These features tend to lead to values clarification. Moreover, in its serious aspects, it is a source of spirtual or aesthetic emotions that, in the collective ceremonies, strengthen the cohesion of the social group. Lovell (1970) understood these functions in the spirituals of Americans of Africa descent. He insists that among other things, the spirituals kept the community invigorated, inspired the uninspired individuals, enabled the group to face its problem, expressed the misery and occasional joy of the black situation,

and stirred each member to personal solutions and to a sense of belonging in the midst of a confusing and terrifying world. Oral art forms shape character and consciousness relative to developing fortitude, commitment to freedom, determination to struggle for a just universe and resistance to oppression, domination, and totalitarianism. The educational and guidance goals, to be effective in furthering the development of black life, cannot be less than these implicit in oral art forms. Consistent with the role of art in the black world, the utility of oral art can be realized through educational guidance techniques.

TECHNIQUES FOR GROUP WORK

Black children, adolescents, and adults, can benefit greatly from group techniques which have grown out of a philosophical orientation rooted in Black life style. These techniques make use of oral art in the broadest sense. All of the oral art specimen, to be used subsequently, have been written and many perhaps were written first but are popular in the oratory of segments of the Black population, and and as such comprise the broadest perspective of oral art forms.

The group techniques to follow are not meant to be complete, not even exhaustive, but rather, are offered to create a vision of what is possible, and to stimulate readers to unleash their creative potential as they endeavor to assist Blacks develop maximally. Helpers, in utilizing these forms to fashion techniques, should remember that oral art stems from human reality, but often is abstracted, generalized, and integrated so as to give birth to effective mythology. As such, while truth is important to retain, the strict literal sense should be prioritized second to the underlying helping elements (motivational, carthartic, pallative, psychically stablizing affects). The importance

of the psychological functions of mythology in a people's higher development is well established, as such is reflected in many literary masterpieces.

I. FOSTERING SELF ESTEEM AND ACHIEVEMENT MOTIVATION

A. General Purpose or Rationale:

To help young Blacks understand that with a clear sense of their past achievements, they will come to appreciate who they are and will view more realistically their own possibilities.

B. Method(s) of Facilitation:

1. Tell orally and dramatically the story of the "Eagle," as told and recorded by Dr. Edward Robinson on his album, Black Rhaposody. The story emphasizes the strength, courage, durability, achievements, historical rooting, and beauty associated with black ethnicity.
   a. Have group members reflect on aspects of their own lives about which the story make them feel better.
   b. Have group members to take their individual reflections on aspects of their lives touched by the story and create art forms with them, i.e. turn the reflections into stories, poems, songs, short plays, paintings, picture stories, movement, etc., and share these with the group.

C. Intended Learning Experience:

1. To help group members gain confidence in challenging and developing meaningfully, perceived weaknesses in themselves.
2. To help group members make use of their own creative, expressive style as they endeavor to exhume potential buried within themselves.

3. To help group members develop a pattern of inquiry relative to knowledge about themselves, so as to better enable them to realize their true potential and sustain high levels of intrinsic motivation, which will increase the likelihood of, excellence as they pursue their chosen careers and life goals.

II. PROMOTING EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE AND SCHOOL RETENTION

A. General Purpose or Rationale:

to help school age youth more fully appreciate the liberative value of a good education, and realize that ultimate human freedom lies in knowledge.

B. Method(s) of Facilitation:

1. Secure a list of proverbs that speak of the value of knowledge and understanding and use it to have group members create a group poem. Each member will orally recite one of the proverbs, and the group will repeat in unison the proverb recited by each member. This brief list of African proverbs from Osei (1970, pp 19-23) will serve to illustrate:

Members: "The lack of knowledge is darker than night."

Group: "The lack of knowledge is darker than night."

Members: "An ignorant man without force can be made a slave."

Group: "An ignorant man without force can be made a slave."

Members: "Whoever works without knowledge, works uselessly."

Group: "Whoever works without knowledge, works uselessly."

Members: "Not to know is bad; not to wish to know is worst."

Group: "Not to know is bad; not to wish to know is worst."

Members: A man with wisdom is better off than a stupid man with any amount of charm."

Group: "A man with wisdom is better off than a stupid man with any amount of charm."

Members: "If you can only find it out there is a reason for everything."

Group: "If you can only find it out there is a reason for everything."

a. "Let's talk about the message for you in this proverbial poem," is a sample counselor lead to facilitate interaction, and could be followed by dialogue regarding the feelings of group members when they find themselves "not knowing" in interpersonal situations.

2. Adapt, in story form, the short narrative on the desire of slaves for an education from John Lovell, Jr. (1972, pp 163-168). The narrative shows the courage, persistence, and artistry employed in slaves overcoming immoral but legal barriers to their right to learn--their right to be free. The lives of Nat Turner, Frederick Douglas, Denmark Vesey and others who used education in their pursuit of freedom are mentioned.

a. Have group members reflect on the quest and struggles of their enslaved kinsman for an education and relate their quest and struggles to our current day educational achievements and privileges, and continuing struggles.

3. Show group members the attitude of the black folk community towards the liberative powers of education as it is reflected in numerous spirituals by having them listen to recordings or sing in unison, the often thinly veilded but profound and deep educational desire and determination for satisfaction thereof that is expressed in many of the spirituals. Some of them are listed in Lovell's Black Song, (1972, pp 637-656): "I Have a Right to the Tree of Life," "I Know I Would Like to Read," "This Little Light is Mine," "Oh My Little Soul Goin' Shine Like a Star," and others.

   a. Have group members share their reflections on resolves that they might make with respect to their own lives as it relate to attaining the benefits of a good education.

C. Intended Learning Experiences:

1. To have group members see that when education is defined as enlightened training for a place in society and for individual personal development, it was a thing highly respected in Africa.
2. To have group members come to a realization that for thousands of slaves the desire for education was one of the strongest and that this desire continues in the black community today.
3. To help group members feel a sense of personal duty, obligation and responsibility to fulfilling the wishes and dreams of their ancestors by not only remaining in school, but by making excellence the only acceptable quality of performance for themselves as they move up the educational ladder.

III. DEVELOPING DETERMINATION AND PERSISTENCE IN WORTHY ENDEAVORS

A. General Purpose or Rationale:

To help young blacks who lack constant and firm courage to understand the necessity for developing fortitude and endurance in the face of misfortune, pain, and calamity.

B. Method(s) of Facilitation:

1. Dramatically read the lyrics of some work songs, and/or spirituals to show that praise and admiration were commanded by those who prevailed under unbearable circumstances. Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps (1958, p. 401-403) provide examples of work songs, "Can't You Line It," and "Chilly Win' Don' Blow," respectively:

". . . A nickle's worth of bacon and a dime's worth of land,
I would buy more but time's too hard . . . .
Wonder what's the matter with the walking boss,
It's done five-thirty and he won't knock-off. . . .

I ast' my Cap'n what's the time of day.
He got so mad he thowed his watch away . . . .

Cap'n got a pistol and he try to play bad,
But I'm gonna take it if he makes me mad . . . ."

The hanh! in "Chilly Win' Don' Blow," represents the explosion of breath at the end of a blow with an ax or pick.

". . . Captain, Captain, hanh! don' be so hard, hanh!
on long-time man, hanh!

Says, you worked me, hanh! in de rain, hanh!
An' you worked me, hanh! in de snow, hanh!
So I, Captain, hanh! cain' hard-, hanh! -ly go, hanh!

An' its' oh, howdy me
An' its' oh, howdy my
Says, I make it where de chilly win' don' blow."

Lovell (1972, pp 320-322) shows blacks, harnessed by oppressive conditions, depicting fortitude and courage in the spirituals:

"We want no cowards in our band,
We call for valiant-hearted men,
You shall gain the victory, you shall gain the day."

And, too, while living amidst discouraging circumstances, they sing, "Don't ever feel discouraged." "Neighbor, you bear your load!," and best said in

"O stand the storm, it won't be long,
We'll anchor bye and bye . . ."

2. Recite orally or play the recording of "Just Don't Make No Sense," from Melvin Van Peebles (1973) Ain't Suppose to Die a Natural Death. The song shows a Black man, standing up, though bent over under the weight of his problems, and the problems of others cast on him.
   a. Have group members, after reflections on facilitative stimuli, talk about difficult circumstances in their own lives where they must call upon inner reserves of strength

to help them prevail, and help group members assess their own values and behavior as they serve to hinder or facilitate their ability to prevail.

b. Have group members dramatize their revelations in short plays stories, songs, poems, dance, or other forms reflecting changes that they must make in their own lives so that they may avail themselves to more of their inner strength, and share these artistically transformed revelations with the group.

C. Intended Learning Experience

1. To help group members understand that their ancestors prevailed under one of the most horrendous experiences known to the human family and that they have inherited this incontestable endurance.
2. To help group members understand that with consistent and persistent struggle coupled with knowledge, they can, not match, but go beyond the achievements of their foreparents.
2. To create in group members an awareness of the need to continue to search within themselves and their past experiences as an oppressed group, for the best options for dealing with troublesome encounters in their personal lives.

SUMMARY

Oral Art forms are the creative products of people and education and guidance has a potent resource to use in the service of people. People's developmental experiences can be enriched, with wise guidance, by the creations that grow out of those experiences. Mibiti, (1968)

confirms these possibilities, contending that Oral Art shapes the whole life of people, and the whole life of people shapes their oral art. "It is like a living shadow of the people," Mibiti prophesizes prosaically, "it moves with them historically, it comforts them, it opens the way when there is darkness, it gives answers to questions when doubts arise." And too, it echoes their moral codes, ethical principles, spiritual strivings, varied needs, while providing them with historical insights which enhance self worth. And these are consonant with the concerns of education and guidance.

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